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Fall 12-2020

The History of Nintendo: the Company, Consoles And Games

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The history of Nintendo: the company, consoles and games

Introduction

A handful of the most popular video games from Mario to The Legend of Zelda, and video game consoles from the Nintendo Entertainment System to the Nintendo Switch, were all created and developed by the same company. That company is Nintendo. From its beginning, Nintendo was not a video gaming company. Since the company's first launch of the Nintendo Entertainment System, or NES, to the present day of the latest release of the Nintendo Switch from 2017, they have sold over 5 billion video games and over 779 million hardware units globally, according to Nintendo UK (Nintendo UK). As Nintendo continues to release new video games and consoles, they have become one of the top gaming companies, competing alongside Sony and Microsoft.

Thesis Statement

From the start, Nintendo has evolved overall as a company; from a playing card manufacturer to developing a wide variety of video game consoles and video games that are played worldwide, they continue to research and expand upon what the company can offer.

Nintendo's company history: Japan

Fusajiro Yamauchi was the original founder of the Nintendo Company in 1889, but this was a few decades before the company started. developing and selling video game consoles and video games. Before the manufacturing of video games and consoles, Fusajiro Yamauchi had manufactured and sold Japanese handmade playing cards (Hanafuda) in Kyoto, Japan (Wagner,

4). It was not until 1951, after Fusajiro Yamauchi's death, and the new leadership of Hiroshi Yamauchi (Fusajiro Yamauchi's grandson), that the company's name was changed to Nintendo Playing Card Co., Ltd. (*Nintendo Co., Ltd.*, 2020) and the direction in which the company was heading started to change as well, due to the extent of the manufacturing of playing cards (Wagner, 4). There was a major change in 1963 as the company started to shift from the origin of playing cards. This was the year in which the company had its final name change to Nintendo Co. Ltd., (Diskin, 3) as well as expanding to other business tactics such as taxi services, toys, and games (Wagner, 4).

In the 1970s, Japan had started to collaborate with overseas businesses as the creation of in-home consoles and computer games started to arise. Nintendo was among those companies that followed in those footsteps of the home video game industry, building alliances with companies in North America (Picard, 2013). Around 1977, Nintendo launched their first home video game machines, TV Game 15 and TV Game 6, which were the first game consoles that were successful (Picard, 2013). A significant event that occurred within the beginning of history for video games, especially for Nintendo, was "The Atari shock" otherwise known as the great video game console crash in the USA from 1982-1983 that affected the development of Nintendo home video game consoles and quality control mechanisms for game products (Suominen, 5).

Nintendo's company history: North America

Through many collaborations and connections within America, Nintendo expanded their company, creating Nintendo of America Inc. Nintendo of America Inc., which is run by Yamauchi's son in law, Minoru Arakawa (Diskin, 3). The subsidiary location is in New York, and was announced in 1979-1980 (*Nintendo of America*, 2020). Within a year, Nintendo

developed and began distributing the arcade game Donkey Kong, which became a popular coin-operated machine in the video game business (*Nintendo of America*, 2020). In 1983, Nintendo of America Inc. was established in Redmond, Washington (the headquarters location) and merged with the subsidiary location in New York (*Nintendo of America*, 2020).

Nintendo's console development

Nintendo's first home video game machines were the TV Game 15 and 6, which were launched in 1977, during the time when 90 percent of the consoles made in Japan were made from major television companies (Picard, 2013). Nintendo did not expect this success because they did not want to invest into the home console market in the beginning of their journey (Picard, 2013). In 1978, Nintendo had started to develop and sell arcade video game machines (*Nintendo Co., Ltd*, 2020). Within a few years, Nintendo released a new home video game system called the Family Computer System/Famicom (in Japan) 1983 (*Nintendo Co., Ltd*, 2020). The Famicom was later re-released and rebranded in 1985 under Nintendo Entertainment System in 1985, featuring some of Nintendo's iconic games such as Super Mario Bros. and The Legend of Zelda (Wagner, 5). Later, in 1988, Nintendo developed the Hands Free controller, which allowed the NES to be more accessible than in previous years (*Nintendo UK*, 2020). Shortly after that in 1989, Nintendo released the Game Boy, a handheld console with interchangeable game cartridges and one screen on the top with the controls on the bottom, along with the 16-bit Super Famicom following the year after (Diskin, 4). The American release of the Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES) was released in 1991, but due to incompatibility with the original hardware, the SNES became the new default hardware (Diskin, 4). After the release of the Game Boy and SNES, Nintendo launched another home video game system, Nintendo 64 in 1996 (*Nintendo Co., Ltd*, 2020). Entering into the 2000s, Nintendo enhanced the Game Boy from

1989, and launched the Game Boy Advance, in 2001, as well as the Nintendo GameCube which was a home video game system (*Nintendo Co., Ltd*, 2020). Soon after, in 2004, Nintendo launched the Nintendo DS, which was another handheld gaming system which was also enhanced into the Nintendo DSi (2008) and 3DS (2011) (*Nintendo Co., Ltd*, 2020). In 2006, the popular home video game system, the Wii came out, in which discs were used instead of cartridges, which was later reimagined as the Wii U in 2012, but the Wii U did not have as much of an impact as the other in-home or hand-held gaming systems as the others prior to it (*Nintendo Co., Ltd*, 2020). In the more recent year of 2017, Nintendo released the Nintendo Switch, which is a combination of a handheld and home video game system, which has been a staple of their sales in the earlier months of 2020 (*Nintendo Co., Ltd*, 2020) due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nintendo's video game history

From the beginning of their start in the video game industry, most of the video games that were produced from Nintendo were coin-operated, or arcade games. Within the 1980s, some of the arcade games that were released were Donkey Kong (1981), Popeye and Mario Bros. (1983), and Duck Hunt (1984). In the game Donkey Kong, Donkey Kong is the villain that the hero (Mario) had to save his significant other from. Initially Mario's name was Jumpman, but was renamed after the office landlord from the establishment of Nintendo of America's headquarters, which is how the name for Mario came to be (*Nintendo Co., Ltd*, 2020). A year later in 1985, Super Mario Bros. was released and sold as a game software for the NES. Following Super Mario Bros in 1986 was The Legend of Zelda, which included another iconic character, Link (*Nintendo of America*, 2020). Most of these games within the early stages of Nintendo production of video games were in the form of 8-bit, pixel art and moved towards 2D art. Right around the time of the SNES releases, the art styles of the games continued to shift.

Most of the games shifted to more 3D animated games for Nintendo 64 all the way through to the Nintendo Switch. Many games have been released with iconic characters such as Mario, Donkey Kong, and Link, but they also expanded the gaming worlds of those characters with Yoshi, Diddy Kong, Kirby, and Fire Emblem. Nintendo has also collaborated in the past and present with Pokémon, for the older and newer generations of video games that have come out on the handheld, home game systems, and now on mobile devices. There is a wide genre of games that Nintendo has produced from the late 1990s to the present time of 2020. They've come out with action-packed games such as the games from The Legend of Zelda and Super Mario Bros. franchise or even Wii Sports (2006), but they've also come out with other games that are for other players who would rather play something more calming, such as Nintendogs (2005) or the many versions of Animal Crossing (2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2017, 2020). But the company as a whole continues to create games for everyone with different gaming backgrounds, allowing there to be a variety of games for anyone to enjoy.

Nintendo's success and more

From the start of their video game production, Nintendo has been very successful in marketing, producing and selling their products; whether it be game consoles, the video games itself or other parts of the franchise that consumers of Nintendo products have come to love. Some of the well-known names that are the top two selling video game franchises that have made Nintendo what it is today are Mario and Pokémon, but also the other collaborations that Nintendo has had with other third-party and independent developers, such as Final Fantasy and Sonic (Wagner, 5).

Though Nintendo has been very successful from the get go, there were some products that the company has produced that did not work out as well as they were projected to be. One of these products was the Wii U, which was released in 2012, failing to live up to the success of its predecessor (Bronner, 2016). Even with 13 million units sold in its lifetime, there were some complications that made this device not such a hot sale (Gilbert, 2017). The hardware system of the Wii U took longer to load and start gameplay (Gilbert, 2017). The Wii U also failed to have consistency of new game releases, which can take interest away from buying the system or continuing to play the home video game system consistently (Gilbert, 2017). With its design, the Wii U had a tablet with the controls and a screen, as well as utilizing the television screen that the home device was hooked up to. This caused players to have to constantly look back and forth between the Wii U and their television. It was not the most effective gaming device, but it did propose and create a more innovative design for the Nintendo Switch that came out in the first half of 2017.

Since the first Nintendo console was sold, there have been many upgrades and enhancements to each of the consoles and games that the gaming community has come to love. In the most recent years of Nintendo's releases of handheld video game systems, the Nintendo Switch has had the most success, with over 68.3 million units sold globally, and over 456.49 million software sales since its release in 2017 (Barder, 2020). This surpasses the sales from 2018 of the NES (61.91 million units) and SNES (49.1 million units) (Barder, 2020). Since 2017, Nintendo started releasing digital versions of games for the Switch, still continuing to release the cartridge games, but this is a way for the games to be more accessible without having to wait for the game to be shipped or in stock in stores. Along with digital online releases, Nintendo released a handful of mobile games, such as Super Mario (Bronner, 2016), Pokémon Go (2016),

as well as Pokémon Cafe (2020). Within the year of 2020 itself, more consumers have purchased the Nintendo Switch due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This was not the only case because there was a collaboration with Animal Crossing, which spiked sales as consumers were trying to get their hands on the console and games. Many people within the gaming community were buying the Switch to occupy themselves while being sheltered in place at home, creating a great way to build a sense of community and interaction with others without having to leave their homes.

Nintendo continues to thrive and expand outside of the video game world with the first theme park, Super Nintendo World, that would be scheduled to open in Osaka's Universal Studios Japan in 2020 (Bronner, 2016), but due to COVID-19, the opening date is pushed back to sometime in 2021. The advertisement for the park does not show what the amusement park would look like, but it does hint at some of the experiences that players can have in the park through iconic Nintendo characters and the games that they have come to love (Lawler, 2020). Nintendo's media presence is shown through the images that have been posted on Twitter as well as other social platforms, letting the world know about what is to come ahead in the future.

Conclusion

Nintendo has become one of the leading game companies, producing new consoles and games through their franchise to engage with those in the gaming community, and continually exceeding expectations; of course not without persevering through trials and tribulations. With their history, it provides more insight for other entrepreneurs that are on the rise, setting yet another foundation for the video game industry.

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